

California Performance Review Commission

Public Hearings - Higher Education Panel

September 9, 2004

Oral Testimony of David Viar

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Leaders of the Community Colleges local boards, administrators, faculty members, classified staff members and students do not support the elimination of the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges and the relegation of the chancellor of our system to a line position answering to an undersecretary, who answers to a deputy, who answers to the Secretary of Education.

This opposition is not because we are against change or are comfortable with the status quo. The opposition is because the change proposed will not save money, will not provide for greater efficiency and effectiveness within our system, eliminates the tripartite higher education structure established by the Master Plan, and ultimately will not increase access to our colleges.

I compliment the valiant efforts of those who worked on this mammoth undertaking. I support their clear recognition of the important and essential role that community colleges play in contributing to the social and economic well being of our state. I commend them for their endorsement of the valuable local nature of community colleges and the role of the locally elected governing boards.

Coordination among the local colleges, public schools, state universities and private colleges is essential; but Recommendations ETV01 & 03 raise serious questions:

- Should, and can, one appointee of the governor be the person, as the CPR report says, “to establish the vision, goals and strategies that guide public policy for California’s education and workforce preparation system;” Or is there greater value in independent boards given authority to focus on the mission of the entities they lead, coordinate and oversee?

The CPR Report calls for elimination of certain “independent” boards such as the Board of Governors. Yet that word references the very value of the gubernatorially appointed board of public citizens – its independence. I fear that for the sake of a clearer organization chart, we sacrifice an independent board and chancellor who focus on helping the community colleges fulfill their mission.

- How can this proposal create true overall coordination, when it maintains separate governing boards for UC and CSU, a California Department of Education and a Superintendent of Public Instruction?
- Does greater efficiency come from a single state-level department?

My observation over the years, working in two large states and in Washington, DC, has been the larger the state or federal department gets, the more bureaucratic and cumbersome it becomes; the more difficult it is for public citizens and those affected by its decisions to know who to turn to for problem solving; the more difficult it is to manage and direct; and the more those providing the services at the local level are tied in knots by undue oversight, reporting and bureaucracy that slows their responses to local, regional, and state needs.

If you want to achieve the important CPR goals of coordination, vision, goal setting and strategies that guide public policy, the massive reorganization, statutory changes and disruption of order that will be created, this proposal is not the way to go. This proposal is not about blowing up the boxes, it is about stacking the boxes one on top of the other until they collapse to the ground.

I propose a simple, straight-forward and doable approach. Urge whoever is governor to assure a highly respected and experienced leader serves as Secretary of Education. Hold monthly meetings of the leaders of each department and education system. (The California Education and Workforce Council proposed is a model). And have the positions of the Secretary of Education, developed through this leadership coordinating council, be given the highest level of respect within the governor's political and policy decision making hierarchy.

A second proposal is to give the community college system board and chancellor the authority necessary to fulfill their important responsibilities and to engage with others, in an equal capacity, in the important coordination sought by the CPR. This requires freeing the system office from Department of Personnel Administration and Department of Finance approval processes for everything from how the office is structured, to the level of compensation provided staff, to how money is spent. (These are the boxes to blow up). Give the system office an amount of money to do its job and then hold the chancellor and state board accountable. As the quote of Ronald Reagan included in the CPR Report says, "surround yourself with the best people you can find (a good BOG and chancellor), delegate authority (to the system) and don't interfere."